

Message Text

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46

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-20 NSC-10 CIAE-00 PM-07 INR-10 L-03

NEA-10 NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 USIA-15

TRSE-00 SAJ-01 DODE-00 DRC-01 /112 W

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R 291245Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5010

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 2343

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MT

SUBJ: ILLNESS OF FINANCE MINISTER

1. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER MORETON INFORMED
AMBASSADOR THAT FINANCE MINISTER JOSEPH ABELA
IS "EXTREMELY ILL" IN LONDON.

2. ABELA HAS A HISTORY OF BAD HEALTH AND
WAS HOSPITALIZED IN LONDON FOR SOME WEEKS IN EARLY
1972. SHOULD HE DIE OR BE FORCED TO RESIGN, THERE
WOULD ARISE THE ONE POSSIBLE CHANCE OF LOSS OF LABOR
PARTY MAJORITY. MALTESE SYSTEM OF FILLING VACANCY IN
PARLIAMENT INVOLVES NOT RPT NOT A NEW ELECTION, BUT
A RECALCULATION OF THE PREFERENCES ON THE BALLOTS
FROM THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION. IT IS GENERALLY
ACCEPTED THAT ABELA'S SEAT IS THE ONLY ONE WHICH
COULD POSSIBLY GO TO A DIFFERENT PARTY UNDER THIS
SYSTEM. SOME NATIONALIST PARTY MEMBERS CLAIM THAT
ABELA'S PERSONAL POPULARITY LED MANY NOMINAL
NATIONALISTS TO GIVE HIM FIRST PREFERENCE ON THEIR
BALLOTS WITH REMAINING BALLOTS GOING TO NATIONALIST
PARTY CANDIDATES. WITH LABOR'S MAJORITY OF ONLY
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ONE VOTE, THE SHIFT WOULD GIVE THE SAME MAJORITY

TO THE NATIONALISTS.

3. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT NVER HAS A CASUAL ELECTION RESULTED IN A VACANCY BEING FILLED BY A CANDIDATE OF AN OPPOSING PARTY. FOR THIS TO HAPPEN IN EVENT OF ABELA'S DEATH, AT LEAST HALF OF HIS SECOND PREFERENCES WOULD HAVE TO HAVE BEEN FOR A NATIONALIST CANDIDATE. AN ANALYSIS OF VOTING TRENDS IN ABELA'S FIFTH DISTRICT AT THE LAST ELECTION DOES NOT GIVE EVIDENCE THAT THIS IS LIKELY. SECOND PREFERENCE VOTES ALMOST INVARIABLY WENT TO CANDIDATES OF THE SAME PARTY. THE RESULTS WOULD NOT BE KNOWN UNTIL ABELA'S VOTES ARE REOPENED, HOWEVER, BUT WE BELIEVE NATIONALIST CHANCES OF GAINING HIS SEAT ARE EXTREMELY REMOTE.GETZ

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